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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8384  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0619  
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0556  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0966  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 2161  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0634  
RUEHPG/AMEMBASSY PRAGUE 0191  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0281  
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE  
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0634  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1075

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000308

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MR](#)

SUBJECT: SENATOR SYLLA: OUR RECURRING VIOLENT BIT ACTOR

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 215

[1](#)B. 08 NOUAKCHOTT 739

[1](#)C. 08 NOUAKCHOTT 582

[1](#)D. NOUAKCHOTT 220

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary: Senator Sylla stated he and a group of anti-coup activists are determined to stop Aziz and derail upcoming elections, through violence if necessary. To this end, he wants to obtain arms and logistical support from the Israelis, and have Post serve as an intermediary between the two parties to facilitate contact. President Abdallahi previously distanced himself from Sylla's agenda -- an agenda that is likely delusional. Post plans to cut off contact. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) PolAsst met with Senator Youssef Ould Tijani Sylla of M'Bout, at his request, on April 29. A well-known visitor to the Embassy (Refs A, B, and C), in previous meetings Sylla has frequently called for more radical opposition to the coup. Sylla began this meeting by summarizing his recent trip to Portugal, Spain, and France, rattling off the various figures he met with. He also held interviews with Portuguese TV and radio "to explain the Mauritanian situation." (Note: Sylla speaks Portuguese fluently. End note.) He then cut to the real point of the meeting. "We have a problem," he said gravely. General Aziz has threatened to cut ties with the US after he is elected, and after that, the Europeans may be next, he stated. This would leave the anti-coup activists out in the cold, subject to "being killed or put in prison," and the junta free to fully embrace Libya and Iran. Aziz must be stopped, he said, and to do that "We need arms through the support of Israel." Money was of no interest, he said; "we are ready to sacrifice our lives" to stop the coup. When asked to clarify what he meant by "stopping" Aziz, he said "capture or liquidate him." PolAsst noted that the USG did not support violent resistance, even if it were in the name of restoring democracy and overturning a coup, but Sylla was undeterred.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) As for logistics, Sylla said all they would need is "four or five cars, some AK-47s and machine guns." Fifty men at most would be sufficient he said, remarking that he had three sons of his own, and could discreetly assemble a

"good team" in his home district of M'Bout. Noting that Aziz was not well protected these days, he would be easy to take out, he reasoned. (Note: Indeed, Aziz has been spotted several times around various parts of Nouakchott with minimal or no visible personal protection. End note.) PolAsst asked what his plan would be after Aziz was removed -- "Abdallahi will come back as President" and there would be no more constitutional problems, he said. When pressed about what Generals Ghazouani, Hadi, and others in the military and security services would do if Aziz were eliminated, Sylla said they would do "nothing." Sylla stated that this course of action had already been decided upon; "now we just need the means." He said if there were no political consensus found soon, his group would want to be ready to act by the start of the official campaign. (Note: The campaign starts officially on May 21 and ends on June 4. End note.) Sylla reasoned that during the campaign would be the easiest time to make an attempt on Aziz, as he will be meeting with people constantly. "It would be very easy for someone wearing a boubou (customary Mauritanian dress for males) to conceal a weapon and infiltrate a meeting," he said.

¶4. (C/NF) Sylla asked for Post to provide him with contact information for the Israeli ambassador for Mauritania so he could make initial contact. Noting that time was of the essence given the compacted electoral calendar, he stated several times that this was "very urgent." (Note: Sylla stated that he had not/not met with any Israeli diplomats during his recent trip to Europe. End note.) He said he would prefer contact with the Israelis to be initiated by the

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US Embassy and stated the necessity of having a "logistical plan in place to aid this group of Mauritanian democrats who want your support."

¶5. (C/NF) Sylla said he had recently met with National Assembly President Messaoud Ould Boulkheir to discuss the current situation. When PolAsst asked if Boulkheir was in agreement with this plan to obtain arms, Sylla replied "If he isn't in agreement, he is almost in agreement."

¶6. (C/NF) Comment: A serial name dropper, Sylla frequently cites others (e.g., Abdallahi, Boulkheir, etc.) in conversations in an attempt to lend legitimacy to his own plans. During Charge's last visit to President Abdallahi in Lemden (Ref D), Charge asked about Sylla, since he often boasted of meeting with Abdallahi and liked to suggest he was acting on behalf of the President and/or the FNDD leadership. Abdallahi praised Sylla for his "clear anti-coup position." When Charge noted Sylla was the most radical anti-coup figure he had met yet due to his advocacy of violence and plans to obtain arms from Israel, Abdallahi chuckled and said, "We did not discuss THAT, I can assure you." Abdallahi reiterated that their struggle was a peaceful one, but conceded that Sylla did have a "hot streak."

¶7. (C/NF) Comment continued: There are several problems with Sylla's "plan," not the least of which is that should his group succeed in killing Aziz, it is highly unlikely that Ghazouani, Hadi, and others would sit by and do "nothing" (particularly given the fact that Sylla and his associates are not White Moor). Moreover, weapons can be obtained relatively easily in Mauritania; if Sylla merely wanted to assemble a cache of weapons, he would hardly need American or Israeli assistance to do so. There is always the possibility that Sylla is leading a false flag operation on behalf of Aziz to goad the US into giving support to his plan, whereupon the press would have a field day and Aziz could trumpet "foreign interference" to rally support. End comment.

¶8. (C/NF) Next Steps: We have met Sylla enough times to determine he is not worth meeting again. We have consistently held a strong position against armed action but he keeps coming back. We would have cut off contacts long ago -- indeed, Charge passed on Sylla's most recent urgent

request for a meeting to PolAsst -- but for the fact that he is a senator, does have some limited weight in Afro-Mauritanian circles, and meets occasionally with Abdallahi. Months old rumors of FNDD small arms procurement indicated someone might be planning an armed response to the coup. If that someone was Sylla, we wanted early warning. If there is something behind Sylla's plots (we are skeptical), the signs are that Sylla would prove someone worse than Aziz.

HANKINS